

# Lincoln Park Public Schools

*Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders at Lincoln Park Schools Today*

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Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Parents/Guardians,

As I shared with you last week the Restart Committee met this past Monday to discuss Executive Order #175 as well as the latest Department of Health guidance which was released last week. There was a lengthy discussion about the hybrid schedule as well as the possibility of moving to 100% virtual instruction. The discussion provided both positives and negatives to both options. The key factors for not moving to the 100% virtual instruction, was we felt the schools can meet the minimum standards to open school per the Department of Education's guidelines, as well as the directive from the Governor that schools must make every effort to open before they will be allowed to move to the 100% virtual option. At this time there are some concerns about the ability to staff the buildings to the level required to keep the students safe as well as at the level of instruction required. The Family First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) is a federal act which provides employees with several leave options due to Covid-19. One of the options that may affect us is the twelve week leave available to all employees for child care. The act allows employees, whose normal child care, schools or child care providers are closed or not available due to Covid-19, the option to take a twelve week leave. The employees are eligible for twelve weeks of leave with two-thirds of their pay. The Committee was concerned about the staffing of the buildings, but felt at the present time we should continue with the Hybrid Option as long as the buildings can be properly staffed.

I provided a summary of the Restart Committee meeting to the Board of Education at Tuesday evening's board meeting. By 4:00 PM on the day of the board meeting, I received twenty-five leave requests from staff members. At the present time the requests are being reviewed, and if this number stays the same or increases, we may need to move to 100% virtual instruction. With this new information the Board had a lengthy discussion on whether the district should stay with the Hybrid Option or move the district to 100% virtual instruction. I was directed by the Board to try to keep the schools open, with the caveat of only if it can be done safely.

With all of the new information and the concerns about the ability to staff our buildings safely, the decision was made to modify our hybrid schedule. A new opening option was created, Hybrid Option 1.5, and the district will be moving forward with this option as of the writing of this letter. Option 1.5 states that sixth through eighth grade students will now receive 100% virtual instruction. As of now the students will not be using the LPMS building for instruction. The preschool through fifth grade students will continue with the cohort model, where those assigned to Cohort A will attend school on Monday and Tuesday and those in Cohort B will attend on Thursday and Friday, and Wednesday will be a virtual day for all students. When the students aren't physically in the buildings they will be receiving virtual instruction. All fifth grade students will be moved to the LPES to start the school year. Due to the number of students in preschool through fifth grade who chose the virtual option, the LPES has ample classroom space available to safely accommodate the fifth grade students that have chosen the hybrid model. Having only one building to staff in person will provide the administrators better options for instruction and for safety procedures being monitored. I also want to note that the Boonton School District, where the majority of our high school aged students attend school, has made the decision to open their schools with the 100% virtual option.

I am sure this new option is not sitting well with many of you, especially our sixth through eighth grade parents and students. I recognize that whatever option was chosen, there would be parents, students, staff, and board members not entirely happy, but we are trying to make the best decision with the directives, options and guidance we have been given. To be transparent, let me also state that I am not happy with the

directives and guidelines that I am required to follow. As I have stated from the beginning, no plan that does not have 100% of the students and staff returning to the schools is a plan that any of us want. At this point in time with all of the information we have, this is the best option to at least get some of our students into the schools. To give you a better understanding of why we have moved in this direction, below is the rationale for opening the district with Phase 1.5:

- The Governor and the Department of Education (DOE) are requiring schools to open, unless the district cannot meet the minimum opening standard required by the DOE. The DOE approval is required before any school district can open 100% virtual.
- The Phase 1.5 Hybrid Option meets the State's requirements.
- The Board of Education has determined the schools should open if they can be opened safely.
- Over 70% of the Lincoln Park parents indicated they are sending their child/children to school if the Hybrid Option is available in September.
- Phase 1.5 will provide an option to some of our teachers who have indicated they would be taking the twelve week leave that is available through the FFCRA. This option allows the district the flexibility of allowing some staff members to teach from home, thereby not needing to take the FFCRA leave. This means that the majority of our students will be able to be taught by the district's certified teachers and will minimize the need to hire substitute teachers during the twelve weeks; some of our teachers will be on FFCRA leave.

Please remember, as has been stated from the beginning of the development of the plan, to begin the 2020-21 school year, the schools can be moved to 100% virtual instruction at any time due to the following reasons:

- A directive comes from the Governor or DOE to close the buildings and move to 100% virtual instruction.
- The Borough's Department of Health directs the schools to close.
- Safety/health issues are identified requiring the closing of the school buildings.
- The building cannot be properly staffed due to the number of employees taking leave or due to illness.

I recognize that many of you are anxious to hear which cohort your child will be in, which will allow you to arrange for child care. With the change in the plan, the administrative team is still working to assign the students into cohorts. The transportation department is also working on transportation with the need to accommodate the fifth grade students being transported to the LPES. The Boys & Girls Club has been notified about the change in the Lincoln Park School District's opening plan and will be providing information on the child care options they will be able to provide to the parents who need it.

Please understand that none of these decisions have been easy to make. A great deal of effort and thought has been put into trying to meet the needs of our students, staff, and parents. I recognize this option, or any option available to us at this time, does not meet the needs of the entire school community. We have been placed into an almost impossible position and truly are making every effort to make rational, well thought out decisions for the school community. As has been stated in every correspondence that has been sent, we will continue making our decisions based on safety and with the goal to return the students and staff back to the school buildings.

Respectfully,

*James W. Grube*

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